



# HEALTHWISE

News to enrich your lifestyle

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## Body Mass Index (BMI) Defined and Explained

mathematical formula based on an individual's height and weight. Automatic calculators can be found online at <http://cdc.gov/healthy-weight/assessing/bmi/index.html>.

The chart to the right, created with information provided by the Centers for Disease Control, highlights BMI scores and their correlating weight status.

BMI	Weight Status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5 – 24.9	Normal
25.0 – 29.9	Overweight
30.0 and Above	Obese

Once it is determined that you have a weight problem through this calculation, follow up with appropriate assessments for specific health risks that may be associated with a BMI of "underweight," "overweight" or "obese" is recommended.

Body weight is only one indicator of disease risk. Combined with a high BMI, the following factors can place you at an even greater risk for certain diseases:

- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- High LDL cholesterol ("bad" cholesterol)
- Low HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol)
- High triglycerides
- High blood glucose (sugar)
- Family history of premature heart disease
- Physical inactivity
- Cigarette smoking

In conjunction with BMI numbers, a person's waist circumference is also an effective way to assess weight and health risk. People who carry most of their fat around their waist, an apple-shaped body, are at greater risk for type 2 diabetes and heart disease. The risk increases with a waist size that is more than 35 inches for women and greater than 40 inches for men. Scientific evidence shows that when people carry weight around their waistline, abdominal fat tends to surround internal organs, impairing their function. Conversely, people who carry their weight around their hips, a "pear shaped" body, accumulate fat directly under the skin, and thus the fat does not interfere with their organ function.

Just as a BMI over 25 can have negative health implications, so too can a BMI of 18.5 or lower, categorized as "underweight" for an adult. A BMI this low could indicate a variety of medical conditions. People with underweight body mass indexes are at increased risk for poor bone health, such as osteoporosis. Younger women classified as underweight may have disruptions of their menstrual cycle and difficulty getting pregnant. Other issues from being underweight can include anemia or a weakened immune system.

Together we can discuss appropriate options for diet and exercise that are tailored for you, and that will put you on the path of minimizing your future health risks. Learning your BMI is a great step in this direction.

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is a quick, easy and efficient screening tool to identify weight problems in adults. While BMI is a strong indicator of body fat percentage, it can vary for age, race and sex. It is important to note that the BMI should only be utilized as a screening tool and is not, in and of itself, diagnostic. For example, older people tend to have more body fat than those who are younger, and women tend to have more body fat than men. Also, some athletes may score a higher BMI because they have increased muscle mass; therefore, they weigh more because the weight is muscle not fat. In fact, some patients notice when they combine diet and exercise, they may go down a clothing size while their weight remains the same. Overall, learning your BMI is a great starting point for a discussion of your health goals with your physician.

How is BMI determined? Body Mass Index calculates a person's fat level by using a complex

### From the desk of Dr. Gwenne and Dr. Tim

Dear Patient:

Welcome to our first issue of *HealthWise*, our medical newsletter. You will receive this seasonally to help keep you up to date about current medical issues. I believe a well educated patient has a much better chance of being a well patient. My new practice promotes good health and preventive care; this newsletter is a part of this effort.

Quite a range of individuals are members of our personalized practice. There are those in excellent health to those with multiple medical issues. Health and fitness are important for all of us irrespective of age. Please speak with me about ways you personally can accomplish your wellness goals.

Even though it is Fall, good health is a year-round endeavor. So read on and enjoy these topical articles in *HealthWise*.

Best of Health,  
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### The “No Embarrassment Zone” ...Gas, Irregularity and Other Discomforts

Gastrointestinal (GI) discomfort, such as gas, constipation or loose stools, are issues everyone experiences at some point. However, if these issues are frequent or persistent, they should not be ignored. For some people, this may be easier said than done. Generally, talking about GI issues and discussing your bowel habits with your physician is outside of our societal norms and comfort zone. As with any health issue, the more details you share (especially family history) the better. How you interpret symptoms and how your physician interprets them may vary dramatically, thus having an impact on an appropriate diagnosis.

Many factors can cause GI-related discomfort such as gas, constipation, diarrhea and cramps. Sometimes, we can have extreme discomfort simply because we ate a food that did not agree with us. However, when these symptoms are experienced with some regularity, the culprit may be a diet low in fiber, stress level, medication (including iron pills and narcotics), lack of exercise, travel or other changes in our routine.

Interestingly, there is a direct connection between your brain and your stomach, and when you're feeling stressed, your stomach reacts. Stress can present in many ways, from “butterflies in the stomach,” to nausea, diarrhea or constipation. Despite a vacation's promise of relaxation and stress reduction, many people encounter intestinal discomfort when traveling. This can be the body's normal reaction to a change in diet and daily routine (including regular visits to the bathroom). Furthermore, the air on board planes is extremely dry, which can lead to dehydration, and, in turn, constipation. It is important to keep well hydrated when traveling.

Persistent diarrhea, abdominal pain and rectal bleeding are warning signs not to be ignored. Early medical intervention is essential to help diagnose—or rule out—a serious disease or condition. Following are examples of symptoms. It is important to note that the symptoms of these minor to very serious diseases can be similar, underscoring the



importance of making an appointment with your physician.

**Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS):** This disorder is characterized most commonly by cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, constipation and diarrhea. Although IBS can cause great discomfort, the intestines are not permanently harmed and it is not likely to lead to a more serious disease. According to the National Institutes of Health it is thought that people suffering from IBS have colons that are more sensitive and reactive to specific foods and stress.

**Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD):** *Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis* are collectively known as inflammatory bowel disease with the following distinctions:

- **Crohn's disease** This chronic disorder causes inflammation of the digestive tract, most commonly affecting the small intestine and/or colon.
- **Ulcerative colitis** Similar to Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis affects the large intestine, marked by inflammation and ulceration of the colon's innermost lining.

Symptoms of the two diseases are similar, including continual diarrhea, cramp-like abdominal pain, fever and sometimes, rectal bleeding.

**Celiac Disease:** This autoimmune disease causes damage to the lining of the small intestine and prevents food absorption, depriving the body of nutrients. Damage results from a reaction to gluten, which is found in all forms of wheat and related grains like rye and barley. Symptoms may include abdominal cramping, intestinal gas, bloated stomach, chronic diarrhea or constipation, and anemia.

**Colon Cancer:** This type of cancer occurs when cancer cells form in the tissues of the colon. Symptoms can include a change in bowel habits, blood in the stool, diarrhea, frequent gas pains, bloating and cramps.

**Gastric Cancer:** When cancer cells form in the lining of the stomach, it is called gastric cancer. The disease forms in the innermost lining of the stomach and spreads outward. Early stage symptoms of gastric cancer may include indigestion, mild nausea, heartburn and loss of appetite.

As is well known, early diagnosis for colorectal cancers is critical for a cure. Screening tests such as a colonoscopy have become a mandatory recommendation in preventive healthcare planning.

Finally, taking a cue from our professional peer Dr. Mehmet Oz and what he calls the “no embarrassment zone,” it is a good idea to monitor your own bowel movements. Shape, consistency, color and odor can be a blunt assessment of your GI health. Anything outside of your norm could indicate a range of issues from simple food irritants to serious problems such as internal bleeding.

Because the symptoms of many GI-related diseases are common with lesser disorders, patients often self-diagnose and treat their complaint with over-the-counter medications, which may be all that is needed. However, trust your instinct. If you think you should see a physician, you should! As with any medical condition, early intervention is optimal for the best treatment options.



### Nutrition Corner

#### What's So Trashy About Junk Food?

“Junk foods” tend to be a way of life for today's on-the-go society, whether it is a quick snack or a fast food meal. Eating while driving or watching television is a common pastime. In both cases, people are distracted and tend not to pay attention to portion sizes or ingredients.

The main concerns about so called junk foods (such as chips, candy bars, French fries, and other fast food items) is that they contain a high percentage of preservatives and additives, tend to be high in fat and sodium, and have little or no nutritional value.

Junk food is apt to contain higher amounts of preservatives and additives for a variety of reasons—to achieve a certain taste or color, or to give a product a longer shelf life. Although food additives are approved by the Federal Food and Drug Administration, this does not mean that they are good for you—as proven by the FDA's ongoing research and changing recommendations.

For example, the artificial sweetener saccharin once carried a food warning label because it was found to cause cancer in laboratory animals. That warning was rescinded in 2000, but saccharin's use had already diminished. The artificial fat substitute Olestra debuted in the

1990s. FDA-approved, it was manufactured in chips and ice cream, but lost popularity because of its side-effects that included cramping and loose stools. Some U.S. products still contain Olestra, but its use is banned in Canada.

“Generally, junk foods are processed products. Their natural nutrition as nature intended has been altered and may no longer be available to the body for various metabolic needs, thus also effecting overall health,” said registered dietitian Debbi Beauvais, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

Be aware of nutrition labels and ingredients and practice moderation. Treating yourself to a serving of potato chips (1 ounce) is not unhealthy when balanced with recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables and proteins. “When it comes to fun foods we crave, you have to be mindful of what you are eating and how much,” Beauvais said. One serving of potato chips (about 1 ounce/15 chips) contains roughly 10 grams of fat (10 percent your recommended daily allowance). The snack size bag of chips usually contains more than two servings, so you can easily push those numbers to an unhealthy level if you do not pay attention to portion size.

Educate yourself by keeping up with the latest studies and government findings. Recently, a Harvard University School of Public Health study found that regular consumption of processed meats, like hot dogs and cold cuts, increases the risk of diabetes by as much as 50 percent. When you have a craving, try to select junk foods with the least amount of fat, sodium and preservatives. If your body could say “thank you,” it would!